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ABSTRACT

The 1988 final report of a task force from the Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission stated that in order to ensure continued growth of the motion picture film industry in the state, the postsecondary community must provide a well-trained and competent work force adept in all aspects of the industry. The film industry is a growing presence in Florida, where Walt Disney World-MGM Studios and Universal Studios Florida are expected to invest more than \$650 million. It became Valencia Community College's goal to find the resources necessary to train "below the line" technicians such as grips, camera technicians, and dolly operators. Valencia and Disney received a Sunshine State Skills grant to provide training for specialized skills in the areas of grip, gaffer-electrical, sound, set construction, and camera assisting. Matching funds provided by Disney included equipment, personnel, and facilities. During the 2-month training period, 121 students were trained. Since there were no extant models or curriculum, the instructors developed their own training components. The long-term goal is that this curriculum will form the basis of a film option in Valencia's Theater and Entertainment Technology, Associate Science Degree Program. A close working relationship developed between those at the college and the Disney personnel. The training was successful. Graduates are being hired. In fact, they are being given preference. Valencia is repeating the program, this time with Universal Studios. (CML)

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PARTNERSHIP WITH INDUSTRY: FILM PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGY
TITLE

Scene - A group of thirty-five people, ages ranging from 19-50, held in rapt attention as a middle-aged man speaks through a bullhorn. In the background we see a water tower with Mickey Mouse ears attached (!) and the logo, Walt Disney World/MGM Studios. . . Rambo rounds a corner. . . the camera rolls.

In 1987 a task force from the Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission conducted state-wide hearings on the status of film education in Florida. It was apparent that the film industry was a growing new presence and that workers for the industry would probably have to be imported from other film producing states. The final report of the Task Force stated that in order to ensure continued growth of the motion picture film industry in the state, the post secondary education community must provide a well-trained and competent work force, adept in all aspects of the industry. Further, the report stressed that education must form partnerships with the film industry and keep in close touch with that industry in order to identify the requisite skills.

It was shortly after this task force completed its report, in 1988, that two companies, Walt Disney World/MGM Studios and Universal Studios Florida, opened their Central Florida operations. Collectively, these two entertainment giants have projected an investment of over \$650 million for the studios and thusly, made a major commitment to Florida as a base of operations.

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There are many reasons for Central Floridians to be excited about the prospect of a film making industry developing in this area. There is of course the "glamour factor" which radiates its own hypnotic aura. The prospect of Orlando turning into Hollywood East with all the trappings like mansions, limos, stars and scandals was reason enough for many to get excited. Of more significance and substance is the tremendous economic impact this major new industry could have on the local economy. Film production is expensive and even conservative estimates suggested that in only five years the value to the Central Florida economy would be close to one billion dollars. Ten and twenty year forecasts were staggering and the growing demand for products created by the expanding cable TV and home video markets seem to suggest they were not totally unrealistic. Additionally, from a vocational perspective it is important to note that film production is highly technical and labor intensive. It takes many people working (up to a hundred) to put one or two people on the screen.

Technical jobs in film production have been, in Hollywood West at least, difficult to get. It has been a tough business to break into with problems of nepotism and strong, closed unions. The rewards have been great, however. An article in the December, 1987 issue of the American Film Magazine said that production technicians in California can earn in excess of \$100,000 per year. Although the estimates of pay in Florida production were lower than those on the west coast they were high by local standards and the jobs would be accessible on the basis

of skill. Producers and production companies were gravitating to Florida in part because of our right to work legislation which prohibits closed shops.

Technical film training presented a unique set of problems. Job titles, grip (something like a stage hand), gaffer (in charge of lighting), best boy (a gaffer's first assistant) were not always clear or completely defined. Union job descriptions are available for these positions, but they are subject to some interpretation and are not directly applicable to Central Florida's market. Similarly, few learning resources are available. The apprenticeship system of training prevalent on the west coast never evolved a canon of learning/teaching resources. Skills were taught on the job, by example. The first and only book on gripping was published in 1988. This shortcoming is magnified by the fact that film making at the technical level has many "tricks of the trade." Unless you can find people willing to share their expertise, teaching would not only be difficult but in all probability incomplete.

Finally there were concerns about the availability of special film making equipment. In general, film production companies rent all of their equipment. Cameras, dollies, cranes, C-stands, are all rented as required by the production and it would not be uncommon for this equipment to travel long distances to support a relatively short shooting schedule. This system of rent rather than own meant that educational institutions would

have to spend a great deal to tool up for training or forge relationships with industry to guarantee the availability of needed hardware.

Valencia Community College, which is located in Orlando, Florida, has worked with Walt Disney World throughout the years to provide educational services and programs. Additionally, employees of the company serve on Valencia's vocational education advisory committees. When it became known that studio film production was in the future, Valencia met with representatives to determine what training needs were foreseen for this new industry. As the discussions progressed it became apparent that the production technician infrastructure needed in order to support film production was non-existent. There were no grips, camera technicians, dolly operators - the "below the line" crew needed to support the key technician personnel which would, we were told, be brought in by film production companies from outside of Florida. This then became our goal, to find the resources necessary to train the "below the line" technicians.

In 1985, legislation was proposed by then State Senator Betty Castor, who is now Commissioner of Education, to provide a funding source, Sunshine State Skills, for training new, expanding and diversifying businesses. The State Board of Community Colleges for Florida administers the Sunshine State Skills program which promotes creative, flexible and efficient customized training services. It acts as a catalyst to bring community colleges in Florida together with employers to provide instructional programs that coincide with targeted current and

future employer requirements. The matching funds from private resources with state funds provides a means to develop new curriculum and customize the curriculum to meet the needs of business and industry.

Valencia, in partnership with Disney, applied for a Sunshine State Skills grant to fund the training for film production technicians and was approved. The grant provided \$200,000 of state funds and \$393,310 of business match. The program began in February, 1988 and continued through December, 1988. The purpose of the grant, "The Central Florida Film Production Training Program," was to provide training of 105 individuals to develop specialized skills in the following areas: Grip, Gaffer/Electrical, Sound, Set Construction and Camera Assisting.

The planning team responsible for developing the grant consisted of the Provost of the East Campus, the Director of Vocational Education, the Chairman of Humanities/Visual and Performing Arts and the Program Director of Theater and Entertainment Technology. Because there were no film instructors on staff the immediate need was to find a person or persons who would conduct the training. A national search began which involved contact with state agencies; major film schools in the country; trade organizations such as International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), American Society of Cinematographers (ASC); and the Directors Guild of America (DGA). Upon review of the applicants, both in terms of availability and areas of film specialization, the team felt that training would be better served if several people with special expertise in

selected areas were hired. The position of "Resource Film Specialist/Lecturer" was shared by three film educators, all with professional background in film production. In addition to these key persons, the grant also provided for working professionals in the specialized areas of training. Several Hollywood "names" were included as well as Disney staff.

The "matching funds" provided by Disney included equipment, personnel, and facilities. Training was done "on property" for the most part in the new Disney studios. Real world, "hands on" training was available on state-of-the-art cameras, HMI lighting, dollies, generators, grip equipment and sound recorders. Additional support was provided by CinevideoTech which loaned the use of an 18 wheel grip truck and their personnel; Eastman Kodak Company which furnished handouts and text materials on film and processing; and other film related companies which have located in the community.

In order to be eligible for the training, students had to have had experience in technical entertainment, video production or a related field. The training, because it was short term, was designed to build on previous technical knowledge. The training period was two months and there were three groups trained over a six-month period. Interest was keen with over four hundred applicants for the slots. The final number of students trained was 121.

As was determined early on, training of this nature has not been available in an educational setting. There were no models or curriculum. The instructors developed the training components

by asking questions such as "What does a grip do?" Then these tasks were written on cards and, over a period of weeks, these were developed into curriculum. The long-term goal is that this curriculum will form the basis of a film option in Valencia's Theater and Entertainment Technology, Associate in Science Degree Program.

Throughout the six months of the program, a close working relationship between the VCC staff and Disney personnel developed. Weekly meetings were held to finalize plans for the coming week. These entailed such diverse activities as coordinating an underwater shoot at the Living Seas Pavilion at Epcot Center or a simulation at the new studio lot of Rambo, First Blood with Lighting Director Andy Lazlo. There was outstanding cooperation from all areas of Walt Disney World. The planning and execution of a complex and diversified activity like film production training requires a general consensus to "get the job done" at every level. Many people, from vice presidents to security guards were involved in the process.

The training was successful. Students give glowing reports of instruction and, "the bottom line", they are working. Film activity is increasing both at Disney and at Universal and graduates of the film production classes are being hired, in fact, are being given preference. The infrastructure for film production has been enhanced. No longer will companies have to bring in their crews, rather there is trained personnel available in the Central Florida community. We and the industry realized, however, that 121 does not a "film town" make, so, we have two

new grant opportunities. A similar program funded by Sunshine State Skills for \$200,000 and business match of \$246,250 and a new federally funded vocational grant of \$406,317 of federal funds and business match of \$134,079 will allow us to continue training, this time in partnership with Universal Studios Florida.

We believe that programs of this nature speak eloquently of the nature of the community college. We work well with our business partners; we meet the training needs of our community; and we assist with job development. All these and, we can move quickly when there is a pressing concern, as in this instance. We are very proud that citizens in our community will be able to get the high paying jobs provided by this new corporate initiative.

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